



Incessant School Closure and Quality of Learning in Universities

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ABSTRACT

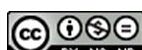
The learning process at any level of education is expected to be smooth, stable and sustainable. This largely determines the effectiveness and quality of such a learning process. This study investigated the influence of incessant closure on the quality of learning in Nigerian universities. This study was hinged on the Behaviourist Theory of Learning which was considered most suitable. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria was purposively selected because the university has one of the highest incidences of disruption of academic activities in the country. Six faculties were selected out of the existing thirteen faculties while 360 students (60 from each faculty) were selected for the study. A self-designed and validated questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using inferential statistics. The findings of this study showed that unresolved industrial disputes and students' protest are the main causes of the frequent closure of universities which over the years have had negative influence on the quality of learning in Nigeria Universities. The study recommended the need for improved funding of the education sector, especially higher education which is critical for the development of any nation.



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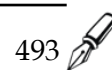


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INTRODUCTION

Universities are seen as institutions of higher learning where knowledge is taught and explored. Nigerian universities are not exempted from the teaching of such knowledge. As part of its mandate, just like any other university across the globe, Nigerian universities are saddled with the obligation of providing students with quality education with a view to developing the total man in the recipients of the training being provided. (Aluede, Aluede and Ufuah, 2004; Adelokun & Fasanmi, 2017). Unfortunately, the nonchalant attitudes of governments at various levels in Nigeria towards funding of the education sector has caused many closures of schools incessantly, thereby sabotaging the quality teaching and learning in public-owned universities and other categories of tertiary education which also provide higher education in the country (Offem et al., 2018; Ntiasagwe, 2020; Ogban et al., 2023).

Incidences of closure of universities in Nigeria can be broadly attributed to three different reasons. One is the issue of strike action by labour unions representing the interests of either teaching or non-teaching staff members within the university. The second is the issue of student unrest which sometimes may go uncontrollably violent and the University Management, in order to forestall a crisis situation, is left with no other option than to shut down the University. The third category is situations when there are interest clashes over leadership positions in the university and the indigenes of the host community of the university choose to go diabolical,



thereby disrupting academic activities in the institution. The most recurrent of the three is that of strike actions by labour unions within the universities. Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Nigeria was purposively selected because the university has one of the highest incidences of disruption of academic activities in the country and the three identified categories of situations that result in the closure are all applicable to the University. In fact, in the last three years, each of these three factors has at one time or another other led to the closure of the University.

The first and the most recurrent of the factors is that of labour union disputes which results in strike action. Such strike action usually may be at the local or national level. Aside from the national strike actions which usually apply to all public-owned universities in the country, OAU has experienced a lot of local labour union disputes over time. The labour unions represent the interests of different categories of workers in the university. There are four recognised and registered labour unions in Nigerian public universities. One is the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which represents the interest of academic staff within the university. Others are the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) which comprise senior members of non-teaching staff such as administrators and bursary staff, and then the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) which comprise academic technologists and instructors in laboratories and technical units and departments, and the fourth is the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) which comprise middle-level administrative staff and other support staff who are not involved in teaching activities.

Oloyede (2021) observed with concern that one of the major reasons for labour union disputes in organisations including universities is the issue of poor working conditions for employees. The study further established that the only language that the government understands is strike, as that is the only thing that gets their attention. The most recent local strike action that disrupted academic activities was the one that was declared by the local branch of ASUU in January 2022 due to the allocation of the Earned Academic Allowance (EAA) released by the Federal Government. There was a tussle between ASUU and its break-away faction, known as Congress of Nigeria Academics (CONUA) on what the sharing formula should look like. This unnecessarily elongated the payment procedure which resulted in a strike by ASUU while members of CONUA in the same university were reported to have continued with academic activities thereby causing a lot of confusion among the students' populace. This local strike lingered until the nationwide strike was declared by the national branch of ASUU on February 14, 2022, which lasted for eight months (Orjinmo, 2022). Eventually, her sister unions joined in the strike to get the attention of the government to pressing issues pertaining to its members. This was noted to be one of the longest strikes in the history of Nigerian universities.

One of the main reasons why ASUU embarked on the strike was the call for revitalisation and revamping of Nigerian universities through adequate funding by the government. There are however other demands which include improved condition of service of its members and the need to curb the proliferation of universities. A situation whereby the establishment of universities has now become a constituency project for politicians, who establish universities to score political points without considering the funding sustainability of such universities. A development that ASUU, as a key stakeholder in the university sector, considers unhealthy for the university system in terms of quality and standard of practices.

Another factor responsible for the incessant closure of universities is the issue of student unrest. OAU has over the years been tagged an "ALUTA University." This means that it is known for radicalism in student unionism and solidarity. In fact, one of the lines of the University anthem is "Aluta against all oppression." The students are always very prompt to resist any form of unfavourable treatment meted on any of their colleagues either as individuals or collectively. In October 2021, a student reportedly died in the University health centre because she was not given the needed urgent medical attention due to her inability to present the Health Centre Card. In a bid to show their displeasure about the situation, which the students claimed had been a recurrent issue; they embarked on a protest that was taken

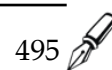


outside the University premises, by blocking major roads in the host community. This resulted in a logjam and constituted a setback for a lot of commuters who were going about their normal daily routine as well as other innocent travellers. The Management of the University had to shut down the university to forestall further breakdown of law and order. The Semester examination which had just begun at the time the crisis erupted had to be suspended and students were asked to vacate the campus. The effect of this development on students is not usually a healthy one because many students who have passionately prepared for the examinations would expectedly have been weighed down and might have lost the enthusiasm to prepare during the closure and suspension of the examinations. The University suddenly ordered the re-opening of the University and directed that the suspended examinations should resume on the 6th of November 2021, thus catching the students unaware. This reportedly affected the performances of students in that examination. Besides the fact that the closure under reference and other reported closures in the past usually have far-reaching effects on the school academic calendar, it also has effect on the students' learning processes and consequently on their academic performance.

The third factor responsible for the closure of universities especially the university under reference is interference from the host community. Ile-Ife which is the host community of OAU is a historic traditional community that is known as the source of the Yoruba race. In fact, it is said that it is from Ile-Ife that the morning dawns from. This makes the community a very traditionally sensitive one to the extent that some days are designated for some traditional festivals and rites in which residents in the community are not allowed to go out during the period of such activities. On days like that, students of OAU who are staying off campus and in the host community are thus unable to attend lectures. The researcher and author of this article who is an academic staff member in the institution have had to cancel some of his lectures at different times because of such occurrences because to go ahead with such lectures on the basis that some students are staying on campus and are not affected by such movement restrictions would be an unfair treatment for the students staying in town and are affected by such restrictions which is necessarily not their fault.

The other dimension to the disruptions attributable to the host communities is such that is quite strange to the academic culture of the university where competence and knowledge is expected to be placed above any other form of sentiment. In 2022, the appointment of the Vice Chancellor of OAU went according to the laid down provisions, and the person that emerged was announced. However, an indigene of the Ile-Ife community was part of the contest and because he did not emerge as the winner, the members of the community staged a diabolical display at the main University gate thereby shutting down activities in the University for days. The University Management had to order the students to proceed on a mid-semester break since the university environment was now unsafe due to the diabolical activities of the aggrieved persons. It had to take the intervention of the King of the town before the siege was lifted. The argument of the aggrieved indigenes was that the "son of the land" who was in the contest should have emerged on the basis that he was an indigene of the community and that no indigene of the community had ever had the opportunity to occupy the position under reference. This obviously sounds strange, but these are sad realities confronting universities, especially OAU which is the focus of this study.

All three broad factors that are responsible for the incessant closure of universities in Nigeria have had a significant impact on the quality of learning of undergraduates. Learning simply refers to the process in which a particular person acquires skills, attitude, and knowledge that are essential to meet the demands of life and to bring about necessary change and reformation in behaviour. In a similar vein, Learning can be considered as change that is permanent in nature because change is brought into students' lives by a teacher, through techniques like developing specific skills, changing some attitudes, or understanding specific scientific laws operating behind a learning environment (Sequeira, 2012).



The quality of learning is about the level of effectiveness of the end goal of teaching which is learning. The quality of learning can be defined as the degree or level of excellence in all aspects of learning (Ghufron & Hardiyanto, 2017). The quality of learning can also be seen as a measure of the success of learning activities, and in terms of the output, the quality of learning is directly related to the performance of learners and in terms of the learning outcomes. The quality of learning at any level is dependent on factors such as the learning atmosphere which has a direct connection with the environment, availability of needed facilities, and the psychology of the learners. In Nigerian universities, the issues of incessant closure of the universities disrupt the learning process of the students. It equally has some psychological and psycho-social implications. One of the sad realities about asking students to go home due to one crisis or the other is that not all of them usually resume back when the university is re-opened. Some of them get dis-interested and decide not to return, some others join bad gangs, some of the females are put into the family way and because of shame they decide not to return, some others sadly meet with untimely death during such period which might have been avoidable if they were busy with their studies in their respective universities.

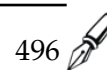
Three fatalities were reported during the nationwide strike in 2022 when public universities were shut down for eight months. A male student in one of the universities in the Northern part of the country committed suicide on 8th March 2022, less than a month after the eight months strike was declared. This implies that many more unreported cases of suicide might have been occurred as a student in just less than a month of the commencement of the strike engaged in such act. A male student and another female student, in different locations, made efforts to get themselves productively engaged during the strike, took up a job and died due to some occupational hazards associated with the jobs. The students who are able to resume alive, usually, would have suffered some emotional and psychological trauma from the consequences of such delays on their dreams, aspirations, and ambitions.

The behaviourist theory of learning was considered relevant for this study. Behaviourist theory of learning associated with foremost psychologists Watson and Skinner suggests that all behaviour is a response to an external stimulus. Behaviourism implies that all behaviours are developed and influenced by interaction with the environment (WGU, 2020). This implies that human behaviour is a product of cause and effect in relation to the environment. Reliable and verifiable observations, some of which have been mentioned earlier in this study have shown that students are getting discouraged from pursuing university education, especially in public-owned universities because of incessant school closure which comes with frustrations. The behaviour of the students towards incessant school closure is that of lack of interest in learning as earlier alluded in cases of students who refuse to resume back to campus after being sent home on account of one crisis or the other. Behaviourism operates on the level that all behaviours are learned through communication with the environment. Thus, some students now believe that university is a scam, the students are gradually seeing the education system as a system that is not worth their sweat because of incessant school closures. Students experiencing the closure of schools frequently see school as a challenging environment and as a result, they prefer going into business where money will come in daily, than education which after studying for four years or thereabout there is no assurance of good employment opportunities.

The purpose of the research was to ascertain the influence of the incessant closure of universities on the quality of learning in Nigerian universities. A null research hypothesis was generated from the research objective as follows; Incessant closure of universities has no significant influence on the quality of learning in Nigerian Universities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, and the choice of the design was informed by the fact that it generates information systematically, in order to describe a phenomenon or situation. Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Osun State which is one of the first-



generation universities in the southwestern part of Nigeria was purposively selected for this study. The purpose of the selection is because the university has one of the highest incidences of closure over time such that school leavers aspiring to pursue a university education are usually sceptical about picking the university as their choice because of the issue of recurrent closure of the university, which may be as a result of student unrest, strike actions by staff unions or some sort of traditional activities and festivals which disrupts academic activities sometimes. A sample size of 360 students (142 male and 218 female) were selected from six (6) faculties namely Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Sciences, and Social Sciences out of the thirteen faculties in the University, 60 students were selected from each faculty using the simple random sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire titled "Incessant School Closure and Quality of Learning in Obafemi Awolowo University" was used to elicit data from the respondents. The data for the study was collected for a period of five weeks. An inferential statistical technique, chi-square was used to test the research hypothesis that was generated from the research objective that was developed to guide the empirical study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A research hypothesis was generated from the research objective developed to guide the study. The research hypothesis was tested using chi-square as presented in this section and shown in the tables below.

Research Hypothesis

Incessant closure of universities has no significant influence on the quality of learning in Nigerian Universities.

Table 1. Influence of incessant closure of universities on the quality of learning in universities

Items	Responses	(f)	(%)
The extent of the effect of the closure of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife on students' learning experience.	Significantly affected	250	69.4
	Somewhat affected	87	24.2
	Neutral	10	2.8
	Not significantly affected	5	1.4
	Not affected at all	8	2.2
Rate of the consequences of closure on students' academic progress and performance	Very negative consequences	116	32.2
	Negative consequences	202	56.1
	Neutral	27	7.5
	Positive consequences	6	1.7
	Very positive consequences	9	2.5
Long-term effects of repeated closure on students' motivation and engagement	Significant long-term effects	184	51.1
	Some long-term effects	138	38.3
	Neutral	10	2.8
	Few long-term effects	19	5.3
	No long-term effects	9	2.5

Source: Field Survey

Table 1 provides a comprehensive analysis of the extent to which the closure of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, has influenced students' learning experiences. The responses are categorized into distinct impact levels and are expressed as percentages. The analysis of the table sheds light on how respondents perceived the effects of the university's closure on students' educational pursuit. Reviewing the responses, it becomes evident that the category of significantly affected has the highest percentage, amounting to 69.4%. This suggests that a substantial majority of participants recognized a notable impact of the university's closure on students' learning experiences, signifying a significant alteration in their educational journey.



Transitioning to the somewhat affected category, a noteworthy portion of responses at 24.2% indicates that many respondents perceived a moderate influence of the closure on students' learning experience. This suggests that while the impact might not have been profound, there was still an observable effect.

The neutral response holds a relatively small percentage of 2.8%. This implies that a minority of participants expressed a neutral stance, indicating that they did not perceive a substantial impact on students' learning experience due to the university's closure. Moving on to the not significantly affected category, the response garnered a mere 1.4%. This suggests that only a very small fraction of respondents believed that the closure had a limited influence on students' learning experience. Lastly, the not affected at all response accounted for 2.2%. This implies that a minor segment of participants indicated that the closure did not impact students' learning experience in any noticeable manner. In summary, the analysis of the table provides a comprehensive overview of how respondents gauged the extent to which the closure of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, affected students' learning experience. The distribution of percentages across various impact levels reveals the varying degrees of influence attributed to the closure on students' educational journey, ranging from substantial impact to minimal or negligible effect.

Table 2: Chi-squared statistics and hypothesis testing results

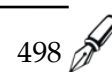
Items	Definitions
Objective	To examine the influence of incessant school closure on the quality of learning in universities.
Hypothesis	Incessant school closure has no significant influence on the quality of learning in universities.
Statistical test	Chi-square
Calculated statistics	20.31
Degree of freedom	4
Significance level	0.05
Decision	Null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant negative influence of incessant school closure on the quality of learning in universities.

Source: Field Survey

The chi-square statistic was computed to determine the influence of school closure on the quality of learning in universities. The chi-squared statistic, with a value of 20.31, exceeds the critical threshold, indicating statistical significance. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, implying a statistically significant negative influence of incessant school closure on the quality of learning in Nigerian universities. This table therefore provides essential statistical information and the decision that recurrent closure of universities has a significant negative influence not only on the quality of learning in Nigerian universities but also on the psychological, emotional, moral, and social lives of students which have the capacity for maladjustment if drastic and proactive measures are not taken to address the hitherto ugly situation.

The findings of this study align with some findings of some other recent and relevant studies. In line with the findings of this study which indicates a significant influence of incessant school closures on quality of learning in universities. Koçer and Sezer (2018) submitted that incessant closure of schools as a result of strike actions affects the mentality of students with a significant negative influence on their learning. Fasanmi (2022) identified the management approach of student welfare services as one of the major causes of students' unrest which often leads to the closure of schools. These findings aligned seamlessly with the study's objective, emphasizing the tangible repercussions of closures on the learning environment.

In line with the concern, this study established about the frequency of closure of universities over the years. Oloyede (2021) expressed a similar concern when he noted that the history of higher education in Nigeria cannot be told without inclusion of a period of closure of

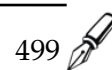


institutions. He advocated the need for a rethink of the strategies for industrial action in Nigerian universities. This is because of the devastating effect of closure and its influence on education especially that of the university which is expected to equip recipients with the competencies required for the adult life. All the participants in his study attested to the fact that they have experienced closure frequently, which shows that the incessant closure of universities is a historical trend.

Owoeye and Akanle (2020) in their study found out that disruptions in the academic activities of students in universities are gradually becoming a norm in the universities, such that every student now see the situation as something to grapple with in the cause of their academic sojourn in the university. Syakur et al. (2023) noted with concern that the learning environment has a way of motivating the learners and when the environment is not conducive, learners get demotivated. Ananoba (2015) noted with concern that the deteriorated conditions of learning of students and poor conditions of working of staff in higher institutions are the two main causes of incessant closure of the universities. Ige (2014) among other concerned observers attributed these to the poor state of funding of Nigerian universities over the years which is evident in the budgetary allocation which was consistently below 10% over ten years. The earlier study on institutional and political factors further submitted that the major disruptions of academic activities in Nigerian universities were a result of demands on the government to rescue the institutions from imminent collapse. On February 14, 2022, the Academic Staff Union (ASUU) after exploring every peaceful means without success, had to embark on a strike that eventually lingered for eight months and the top on the list of demands of the university teachers was the need for the government to revitalise and revamp public owned universities across the nation; which a lot of young people have now lost confidence in. This makes a lot of them prefer to travel to neighbouring countries to study, because they cannot afford to enrol in Nigerian universities where they only know the time they were admitted without knowing when the programme will be completed. This can be corroborated with Yami (2023) who expressed concern on the issue of brain drain and capital flight occasioned by the unsatisfactory state of universities in some countries leaving students with no option but to opt for study abroad not minding the cost. The study recommended the need for the government to prioritise the funding of education and reduce the cost of governance and the various leakages associated with public spending in the country.

CONCLUSION

The study has offered valuable insights into the persistent issue of recurrent closures of Nigerian universities, focusing on their impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The research objective which was to assess the influence of the closure and investigate learning quality, was comprehensively addressed through the gathered data and analysis. The findings reveal the gravity of the problem, with most respondents acknowledging the significant impact of closures on the quality of learning experiences. This underscores the urgent need for thorough examination and strategic interventions to address the root causes of these closures. The influence of university closures on learning quality was also evident, as disruptions posed challenges to educators in maintaining high standards of instruction. Strategies to adapt to these interruptions and sustain learning quality are imperative. Furthermore, the investigation into learning quality highlighted the hurdles students face when their educational continuity is disrupted. These challenges demand innovative solutions to ensure students can continue their studies effectively. The incessant closure of Nigerian universities remains a critical issue that requires immediate attention. It influences learning quality, disrupts academic calendars, and potentially hinders students' progress. Addressing the root causes and ensuring uninterrupted learning experiences are crucial steps to mitigate the influence of closures and maintain the quality of education in Nigerian universities. By taking these measures, the educational landscape in Nigeria can strive toward greater resilience and continuity in the face of recurrent closures, ultimately benefiting students, teachers, and the society at large.



The study recommended the need for proactive measures to be taken by relevant stakeholders, especially the government to prioritise the funding of higher education. In the current fiscal year (2024), only 6.39 percent of the national budget was allocated to education which is expected to take care of primary, secondary and tertiary education. This appears ridiculous but it is a sad reality that has been staring the education sector in Nigeria in the face. A situation where a chunk of the budget is allocated to taking care of the already comfortable political class at the expense of education, which is the springboard for present and future development needs to be addressed urgently. There is a need for sincerity on the part of the government to judiciously utilise the available resources based on priorities. This begins with appropriate budgetary allocation to the sector. The rate of capital flight from the nation is getting increasingly worrisome. A situation in which billions of naira are ferried out of the country to other countries by students who travel out of the country not necessarily for the sake of internationalisation which is a good one but because they have lost confidence in the educational system of their country given their past experiences especially at the bachelor's level and cannot afford to take further chances at higher levels of study.

One of the limitations to the study is the fact that the study could only cover one university out the numerous public universities in Nigeria. It is therefore suggested that future research in this area be conducted in other public universities in the country.

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